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ABSTRACT

The programs of the two back-to-basics schools in Jefferson County, Kentucky, are briefly described in this speech. The two schools, one high school and one elementary school, are alternative programs. The emphasis is on traditional curriculum, patriotism, respect, competition, and citizenship. Recitation, drill, and homework, along with "no-nonsense" discipline, are important elements of these programs. More traditional, back-to-basics schools are planned for Jefferson County if the school district can meet the desegregation guidelines set up by the federal district judge. (Author/DS)

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I'M PLEASED TO BE HERE IN HOUSTON AND TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH YOU ABOUT OUR BASICS PROGRAM IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, KENTUCKY. SINCE BEING ELECTED TO THE SCHOOL BOARD TWO YEARS AGO, I HAVE BEEN A STRONG SUPPORTER OF THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL MOVEMENT IN OUR DISTRICT AND AM QUITE PLEASED WITH THE DIRECTION IT IS TAKING.

THE OTHER DAY DURING ONE OF OUR BOARD MEETINGS, A DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT GOT UP TO SPEAK. HE PAUSED FOR A MOMENT, NOT QUITE SURE HOW TO BEGIN AND THEN FINALLY SAID, "GOOD AFTERNOON, MADAM CHAIRPERSON AND MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION." (PAUSE) THIS CONFUSION OVER WHAT TO CALL SOMEONE OR SOMETHING IS RAMPANT IN EDUCATION TODAY. WE HAVE OPTIONAL SCHOOLS, ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS, TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS, NUMEROUS PROGRAMS WITH ODD-SOUNDING NAMES AND MORE, MUCH OF WHICH LEAVES THE PUBLIC WONDERING WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT.

IN MY DISTRICT WHERE WE HAVE 116,000 STUDENTS AND A FISCAL BUDGET OF 174 MILLION DOLLARS, I FIND THAT THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL CONCEPT AND THE TERM, "BACK TO THE BASICS," HAVE MULTIPLE MEANINGS AMONG SCHOOL PATRONS. WE HAVE A BIG DISTRICT WITH MORE THAN 800 THOUSAND PEOPLE. FOR THIS REASON AND OTHERS, I PREFER THE TERM, "FORWARD WITH THE BASICS,"

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AS A SLOGAN FOR WHAT IS BEING CALLED "TRADITIONAL" EDUCATION. WE ARE NOT GOING BACK ANYWHERE, NOR ARE WE CONCERNED SO MUCH WITH WHAT HAPPENED YESTERDAY. WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT TOMORROW AND WHAT THE SYSTEM WILL PROVIDE IN THE WAY OF EDUCATIONAL ENRICHMENT FOR OUR CHILDREN.

WHAT IS A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL? IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, WE SEE THIS AS MORE OF A "HOW" THAN "WHY" QUESTION. BY THAT I MEAN WE ARE NOT TALKING SO MUCH ABOUT A CHANGE IN CURRICULUM AS WE ARE THE MANNER IN WHICH IT IS PRESENTED. WE HAVE DEFINED A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL AS A PLACE DEDICATED TO THE CONCEPT OF SCHOLARSHIP, PATRIOTISM, COURTESY, RESPECT, RESPONSIBILITY, AND CITIZENSHIP. A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL STRIVES TO DEVELOP IN ITS STUDENTS THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE COMPETENCE IN FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS; IT STRIVES TO DEVELOP STRONG CITIZENSHIP, BASED ON COMMONLY ACCEPTED SPIRITUAL VALUES AND STRONG MORAL FIBER. TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS WANT STUDENTS TO DEVELOP RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERSONAL BEHAVIOR AND A SPIRIT OF INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT AND COMPETITION. TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS ARE SETTINGS FOR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN TO DEVELOP INTO MATURE ADULTS.

IN A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL, PATRIOTISM IS HEAVILY EMPHASIZED. IT IS A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL BELIEF THAT STUDENTS MUST BE READY TO SUPPORT AND ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF IDEALS UPON WHICH THE UNITED STATES WAS FOUNDED.

TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS HELP STUDENTS DETERMINE WHO THEY ARE, WHERE THEY ARE GOING IN LIFE, AND WHERE THEY FIT INTO SOCIETY.

TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS ARE NOT MILITARY SCHOOLS, OR "CURE-ALL" SCHOOLS FOR DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS, NOR ARE THEY COLLEGE PREP SCHOOLS.

TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS ARE A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS WHO LEARN BEST IN THE SETTING THEY OFFER. THE MANNER IN WHICH INFORMATION IS TAUGHT, IS THE KEY TO ACHIEVING TRADITIONAL SCHOOL GOALS. THAT IS WHY MANY PARENTS HAVE PETITIONED THE JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION FOR THIS TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM. THE BOARD HAS RESPONDED BY PROVIDING A TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL AND A TRADITIONAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, THUS FAR. TWO MORE TRADITIONAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ARE BEING CONSIDERED FOR NEXT YEAR, WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE LOCAL FEDERAL DISTRICT JUDGE.

IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO KEEP SEVERAL IMPORTANT FACTORS ABOUT OUR TRADITIONAL SCHOOL PROGRAM IN FRONT OF THE PUBLIC. FIRST, THAT ANY TRADITIONAL PROGRAM MUST COMPLY WITH A DESEGREGATION ORDER. SECOND, TRADITIONAL SCHOOLING IS FOR SOME CHILDREN, BUT NOT FOR ALL CHILDREN. A THIRD IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THAT TRADITIONAL SCHOOLING IS JUST ONE LEARNING-TEACHING STYLE THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY. NEXT, THAT TRADITIONAL SCHOOLING CONTINUES TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR ADULT LIFE IN THE REMAINDER OF THIS CENTURY AND IN THE

COMING ONE. AND LASTLY, THAT PARENTS, TEACHERS, CHILDREN, AND OTHERS INVOLVED IN EDUCATION UNDERSTAND WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM "TRADITIONAL EDUCATION."

THIS IS OUR SECOND YEAR UNDER DESEGREGATION GUIDELINES. THE FEDERAL COURT ORDER STATES THAT NO SCHOOL MAY HAVE FEWER THAN 12% OF ITS STUDENTS WHO ARE BLACK AND NO MORE THAN 40% BLACK. EACH ONE OF OUR 165 SCHOOLS, INCLUDING THE TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL AND TRADITIONAL GRADE SCHOOL, OPERATES WITHIN THESE RACIAL GUIDELINES. IT'S OBVIOUS THEN, THAT SINCE OUR TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS COME WIHTIN THE DESEGREGATION ORDER'S SCOPE, THESE SCHOOLS ARE NOT HAVENS FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS WHO ARE ATTEMPTING TO ESCAPE BUSING.

TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS ARE NOT FOR EVERYONE. EDUCATORS HAVE REALIZED FOR MANY YEARS THAT ALL CHILDREN DO NOT LEARN AT THE SAME RATE, UNDER THE SAME ENVIRONMENTS, AND TO THE SAME DEGREE. AFTER MANY YEARS OF PLAYING "CATCH-UP" TO THE BABY BOOM ERA AND TO A PERIOD OF HIGH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MOBILITY, WE NOW HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO STUDY AND DEVELOP VARIOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT ULTIMATELY SHOULD ADDRESS THE PARTICULAR NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY. CHILDREN ARE DIFFERENT; THEREFORE, IT IS UP TO THE SYSTEM TO PROVIDE A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT WHICH WILL BE MOST CONDUCIVE TO CULTIVATING EACH INDIVIDUAL'S UNIQUE ABILITY.

TWO TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS IN JEFFERSON COUNTY PROVIDE A PHILOSOPHY AND LEARNING CLIMATE IN RESPONSE TO PARENTS WHO WANT THEIR CHILDREN TO STUDY AND LEARN IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH HAS EMPHASIS ON THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF READING, WRITING, AND ARITHMETIC; WHERE THERE IS EMPHASIS UPON A MORE STANDARD CURRICULUM WITHOUT EXCESSIVE ELECTIVES; WHERE THE TEACHER IS AN AUTHORITY SYMBOL; WHERE RECITATION, DRILL, AND HOMEWORK ARE EMPHASIZED, ALONG WITH A "NO-NONSENSE" APPROACH TO DISCIPLINE, THE TRADITIONAL A-B-C-D-F GRADING SYSTEM AND EQUIVALENT NUMERICAL VALUES, AND PATRIOTISM.

ALTHOUGH MY TIME IS LIMITED, I HAVE BROUGHT ALONG SOME SLIDES WHICH WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN OUR COMMUNITY. BUT FIRST, I'D LIKE TO HAVE SOME OF THE CHILDREN AT OUR TRADITIONAL ELEMENTARY TO TELL YOU WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT THEIR SCHOOL.

THOSE SONGS WERE WRITTEN BY ONE OF THE TEACHERS AT THE SCHOOL. I THINK THOSE VOICES TELL YOU, IN A MOST BELIEVABLE WAY, WHAT THOSE STUDENTS THINK ABOUT THEIR SCHOOL.

BECAUSE TEACHING PATRIOTISM IS A PRIORITY IN THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL, THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DAY BEGINS WITH A FLAG-RAISING CEREMONY, NATIONAL ANTHEM, AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

While at the high school, students participate in the National Anthem and take a few moments for silent meditation.

Our elementary school draws more than 600 students from 87 home schools around the district. The racial percentage is 15% black and 85% white, which is within the court-ordered guidelines.

The traditional high school has 428 students, 81% of whom are white and 19% of whom are black.

Our traditional schools emphasize discipline. Hallways are quiet; and when students do pass through them, they do so in a calm manner.

We have a discipline code which was written by the faculty and which is sent home for parents to read and sign as an indication of their support for this code.

Discipline stresses responsibility for one's behavior and its consequences, respect for self and others, as well as respect for authority.

One of the keys to success in traditional education is the dedication and consistent cooperation of the

STAFF IN ACHIEVING GOALS WITHIN A COMMON FRAMEWORK EACH TEACHER BELIEVES IS GOOD FOR STUDENT GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT.

TEACHERS IN OUR TRADITIONAL PROGRAM ASKED TO BE THERE AND EACH WAS SCREENED BEFORE BEING SELECTED FOR THE PROGRAM.

IN THE ELEMENTARY PROGRAM, READING SKILLS, SPELLING, PENMANSHIP, AND COMPUTATIONAL MATH ARE EMPHASIZED.

FROM THE FIRST THROUGH SIXTH GRADE, THESE SKILLS ARE SEQUENTIAL AND SPIRAL IN DEVELOPMENT.

SPELLING TESTS ARE GIVEN WEEKLY TO ASSESS PROGRESS, AND SOMETIMES CLASSES COMPETE AGAINST EACH OTHER.

EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON KNOWING HOW AND WHEN TO ADD, SUBTRACT, MULTIPLY AND DIVIDE.

TEACHERS ALWAYS STRESS ACCURACY AND NEATNESS.

CAREFUL TEACHING AND CHECKING ON THIS SKILL IS PART OF THE DAILY ROUTINE.

THE STRESS ON THE BASICS CONTINUES INTO HIGH SCHOOL WHERE ENGLISH IS REQUIRED EACH YEAR, ALONG WITH ALGEBRA, GEOMETRY, AND OTHER MATH COURSES.

In addition, social studies and American government courses are required each year.

This 5th grade class practices composition skills in a creative project, publishing the school newspaper which has been aptly named, The Tiger's Tale. All classes contribute news items, stories and activities.

Science units and related experiments are part of the curriculum at each school.

Students in our schools memorize and recite parts of speeches and poems that stress American ideals.

Homework is an integral part of the program from 1st - 12th grade.

Assignments are graded and returned to the student who takes them home for parents to review.

Our schools use the traditional A-B-C-D-F grading system.

Each child must achieve minimal grade standards to pass to the next grade.

TEACHERS HAVE MADE IT CLEAR TO PARENTS THAT A "C" ON A REPORT CARD MEANS THAT A STUDENT IS WORKING AT GRADE LEVEL AND IS DOING "GOOD WORK."

THE DRESS CODE AT EACH SCHOOL STRESSES NEATNESS, CLEANLINESS, AND APPROPRIATENESS.

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WHAT A STUDENT WEARS SHOULD NOT DISTRACT OTHER STUDENTS FROM LEARNING.

PRINCIPALS DO NOT DEMAND UNIFORMITY, BECAUSE THIS IS SCHOOL, NOT THE ARMY; STUDENTS ARE INDIVIDUALS.

BUT THERE ARE RULES WHICH ARE STRICTLY ADHERED TO. THE BARE LOOK IS "OUT"--STUDENTS DO NOT WEAR SHORTS, TANK TOPS, HAVE BARE MIDRIFFS OR BARE BACKS IN SCHOOL.

THEY DO NOT WEAR HATS OR CAPS IN THE BUILDING.

THEY DO WEAR SHOES AND SOCKS.

TEACHERS INSIST ON PERSONAL CLEANLINESS AND PERSONAL ATTRACTIVENESS, WHICH CALLS FOR MODERATION IN VOICE, POSTURE, AND MANNERS.

STUDENTS IN THE TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL DO NOT SMOKE ON SCHOOL PROPERTY.

I REALIZE FULL WELL THAT TEN YEARS AGO, FEW OF US REALIZED THAT WE'D BE TALKING ABOUT ANY OF THESE ACTIVITIES AS THOUGH THEY WERE SOMETHING UNUSUAL IN SCHOOL. BUT, TIMES DID CHANGE.

IT'S IMPORTANT FOR THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL TO GET PARENTS INVOLVED WITH THE SCHOOL AND GIVE IT THEIR SUPPORT.

TO A LARGE DEGREE, THE MERE PRESENCE OF A CHILD IN A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL IS AN INDICATION OF THE RESPECT AND SUPPORT HIS PARENTS HAVE FOR THIS CONCEPT.

IN OUR TRADITIONAL ELEMENTARY, MOTHERS ARE TRAINED TO PROVIDE PROGRAMMED TUTORING SERVICES FOR SOME PUPILS.

IN ADDITION, THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAS ABOUT 250 PARENT VOLUNTEERS WHO DO EVERYTHING FROM SERVING AS ROOM PARENTS TO BAKING COOKIES, TELEPHONING, AND WORKING IN THE LIBRARY.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS USUALLY HAVE AN ACTIVE PTA.

OUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAS THE LARGEST PTA MEMBERSHIP OF ANY OTHER SCHOOL IN JEFFERSON COUNTY.

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION LOOKS FORWARD TO BASICS THAT SUPPORT AND COMPLEMENT SUCH SURVIVAL SKILLS AS KNOWING ONESELF AND KNOWING HOW TO COPE IN A CHANGING WORLD AS A RESPONSIBLE ADULT.

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, EDUCATORS ARE RESPONDING TO CIVIC, BUSINESS, AND COLLEGIATE DEMANDS THAT CHILDREN BE MORE PROFICIENT IN THE BASIC SKILLS OF THE 3 R'S.

ADDED TO THIS "TRADITIONAL" TRINITY ARE MOVEMENTS TO ENSURE THE ACQUISITION OF BASIC SKILLS THROUGH MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTS FOR STUDENTS ABOUT TO GRADUATE, PROFICIENCY TESTING FOR ADVANCEMENT, AND PERFORMANCE-BASED CURRICULUM.

ALL OF THIS CLEARLY INDICATES THE NEED FOR BASIC EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN.

AS I MENTIONED, IN JEFFERSON COUNTY WE NOW HAVE TWO TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS--A HIGH SCHOOL AND AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAM. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION IS SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING A RECOMMENDATION FROM A CITIZENS COMMITTEE THAT THE HIGH SCHOOL BE IN A BUILDING OF ITS OWN AND THAT TWO MORE TRADITIONAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS BE ADDED TO THE PROGRAM. THE TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SHARES ITS BUILDING WITH A REGULAR HIGH SCHOOL. THE FEDERAL DISTRICT JUDGE WHO ISSUED THE DESEGREGATION ORDER HAS

GIVEN US PERMISSION TO OPEN TWO MORE TRADITIONAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AS LONG AS THEY MEET HIS RACIAL GUIDELINES WITHIN A YEAR. AT THIS POINT, THE BOARD ISN'T SURE THAT CAN HAPPEN SINCE TRADITIONAL EDUCATION SEEMS TO APPEAL MORE TO WHITES THAN BLACKS...AND SO, WE COULD HAVE A PROBLEM GETTING ENOUGH BLACKS INTERESTED TO OPEN THE SCHOOLS.

THE TRADITIONAL ORIENTATION PROGRAM IN JEFFERSON COUNTY IS OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS WHO WANT IT AND FOR WHOM WE HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ACCOMMODATE. IT IS THE BASIC EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WHO LEARN BEST FROM THIS APPROACH, BUT AS I SAID EARLIER, IT IS NOT FOR EVERYONE. THE BOARD RECOGNIZES THAT AND IS NOT TRYING TO FORCE IT ON ANYONE NOT INTERESTED.

WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS STIFLE CREATIVITY OR PREVENT A STUDENT FROM DEVELOPING SELF-CONTROL. WE DO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT AN ORDERED ENVIRONMENT PERMITS CREATIVITY IN SOME CHILDREN TO DEVELOP IN SUCH A WAY AS TO PERMIT THEM TO ACHIEVE THEIR UNIQUE POTENTIAL.

OUR OPTIONAL SCHOOLS COMMITTEE IS LOOKING INTO SEVERAL OTHER POSSIBLE TYPES OF SCHOOLS, INCLUDING A MATH/SCIENCE SCHOOL, AN ECOLOGY SCHOOL, AND A FOREIGN LANGUAGE/POLITICAL SCIENCE SCHOOL. JUST LAST WEEK, GROUND WAS BROKEN FOR A NEW 4 MILLION DOLLAR YOUTH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER WHICH WILL DOUBLE AS AN OPTIONAL SCHOOL FOR ARTISTICALLY-TALENTED STUDENTS.

ALTHOUGH THE THEME OF THIS MEETING IS "BACK-TO-THE-BASICS," I WOULD URGE YOU TO THINK IN TERMS OF "FORWARD WITH THE BASICS" AS THE BEST MEANS FOR PROVIDING THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES SOME CHILDREN NEED...AND MANY PARENTS ARE DEMANDING. THAT IS WHAT WE HAVE DONE IN JEFFERSON COUNTY AND THE OVERWHELMING RESPONSE AND COMMUNITY INTEREST INDICATE TO ME THAT WE'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK. THANKS FOR LISTENING AND COME VISIT US.